

The Deity of Jesus Christ

The Holy Trinity at first glance, can look like a subject which is quite irrelevant to every day life. However, when we look at societies where they lack the worship of a triune God, it becomes apparent that something is missing. In the Muslim religion, Allah is a solitary figure who dwells alone.

This thought plays some part in the acceptance in Muslim countries of dictatorial governments. To the Muslim mind, a man at the head of government dictating without consultation with anyone else, sits well with their view of Allah who is not a triune God. It also sits well with the very dominant position which men have over women in their societies, and particularly, husbands over their wives. In Saudi Arabia, it was not until 2017 that women were allowed to drive a motor vehicle.

Christians have the benefit of knowing that God is a triune God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Mankind is made in the image of a triune God, consequently, it should not surprise us there is a triune relationship in the family unit; father, mother and children. The focus in this brief paper is to show that Jesus not only came to this earth as a man, but also as God.

The deity of Christ is seen in the following passages:

- Jesus is God. (Isaiah 40:3, Matt. 3:3)
- He is the mighty God (Isaiah 9:6)
- Jesus is from everlasting (Micah 5:2)
- God calls Jesus 'Lord' (Mark 12:36)
- God calls Jesus God (Heb. 1:6, 8)
- "... the Word was God ..." (John 1:1)
- "Great God and saviour" (Titus 2:13), also Hoseah 1:7
- "... Christ, who is God over all ..." (Rom. 9:5)
- He is the sustainer of all things (Colossians 1:16)
- Believers are baptised in the name of the three persons of the Godhead; Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19)

Jesus declared himself to be equal with God

"So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defence Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself **equal with God**." (John 5:16-18).

God says about Jesus Christ

"... when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels **worship him**'" (Heb. 1:6). "But about **the Son** he says, 'Your throne, **O God**, will last for ever and ever; ...'" (Heb. 1:8).

Some heretical groups claim that Jesus is simply a chief angel. But please note, the above passage does not say 'Your throne, O angel, will last for ever and ever', but rather, 'Your throne, **O God** [Gk. Theos], will last for ever and ever; ...'"

A man is not to be worshipped.

As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." (Acts 10:25-26).

The Apostle John is forbidden from worshipping an

angel: "'Then the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' And he added, 'These are the true words of God. At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.'" (Revelation 19:9-10).

Jesus informs the Devil that only God can be worshipped

"'Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Matthew 4:8-10).

Jesus accepted worship

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and **have come to worship him**.'" (Matt. 2:1-2).

The Apostle Thomas worshipped Jesus

"Thomas said to him, '**My Lord and my God!**' Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" (John 20:28-29).

He has the title 'Son of Man', and has authority to forgive sins. "'But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.'" So he said to the paralysed man, 'Get up, take your mat and go home.'" (Matthew 9:6).

False teachings

The Church had to deal with false teaching from the very beginning. For instance, it had to refute the idea that it is necessary for a male to be circumcised in order to be saved (1 Cor. 7:19, Gal. 5:6, 11).

A heresy concerning the person and work of Christ came out of a pagan Greek idea that all matter is essentially evil. This thinking developed into the idea that Jesus could not have a body of flesh, but that he only *seemed* to have a body. This thinking is **docetism** from Greek *dokein*, to seem. The Apostle John refuted this idea by declaring, "This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, ..." (1 John 4:1-2). This heresy is serious because if Jesus did not come as a man to suffer and die, then rise again on the third day on behalf of all those who place their faith in him; then there is no true saving work of Christ.

Around **three hundred years** after the above heresy came into the Church, another serious heresy developed under the teaching of **Arius** from Alexander. His teaching, known as **Arianism**, continued quite strongly in some sections of the

Church from around **318 - 381 AD**. His teaching denied the deity of Jesus Christ. Arius taught that Jesus is a *created* being, of a different substance to the father.

A large number of bishops under the direction of Emperor Constantine gathered at Nicea (modern Isnik in Turkey, West of Ankara) in the year 325. This council affirmed that Jesus is begotten of the Father; not created, and that he is of the same substance as the Father. From this council, we have the 'Nicene Creed'.

The Nicene Creed

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, **of the essence of the Father**, God of God], Light of Light, **very God of very God**, begotten, not made, **being of one substance** (ὁμοουσιον) with the Father; by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the Holy Ghost.

[But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable' - they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.]

'Catholic' in the above context simply means universal. Not to be confused with 'Roman Catholic'. The denial of the deity of Jesus Christ has surfaced in modern times under the teaching of Charles Russell.

The Jehovah's Witnesses

The founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses cult is Charles Taze **Russell** (1852-1916). Russell was a man who failed to gain a good grounding in the faith in his early years, consequently, he drifted from one idea to the next. Russell was raised a Presbyterian, but became dissatisfied with their doctrines and joined the Congregationalists, but eventually found this group to be not to his liking also. He then declared himself to be a skeptic. He remained in this frame of mind until he met a group who called themselves 'Second Adventists' led by Jonas Wendell.

This group was a remnant of the Millerite movement which had predicted the second coming of Christ in October 1844. While 'The Great Disappointment of 1844' caused many to abandon the Millerite or Adventist cause, this group pushed on with another prediction. It was decided that Christ would return in the period 1873-74. This prediction also failed.

In 1876, Russell joined forces with N. H. Barbour who believed that Jesus did return in 1874, only he did so invisibly and spiritually. In 1877, they published a book, *Three World's or Plan of Redemption*, which proclaimed their view that the millennium had begun in 1874. However, five years later, they parted company over a theological dispute concerning the atonement of Christ. Russell then began (1879) the publication of a new magazine titled, '*Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*'. This resulted in his ideas spreading. Also in 1879, he married. The marriage lasted

eighteen years (separated in 1897, divorced 1908).

In 1881, Russell formed the unincorporated *Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society*. Much of the financing came from his haberdashery business. On 13 December 1884, the rapidly growing society became chartered and incorporated, marking the official beginning of Zion's Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Twelve years later, 'Zion' was dropped from the official title, leaving it with the name which continues today, *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society*.

The name Jehovah

Jehovah's Witnesses insist on using the name 'Jehovah' for God. Anyone using the more common name 'God' faces the possibility of censure by the elders. This attitude fails to understand that while Jehovah is the primary name used by the Jews, they also used other names, because no single name can adequately describe our awesome God. They used on appropriate occasions, names such as Yahweh, Elohim, El-Shaddai and Adonai. Christians at times call God, Father/Abba (Rom. 8:15, Gal.4:6).

The New Testament

In the New Testament, the Greek word *Theos* is used. The English translation of *Theos* is *God*. The Apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit did not stick to the name, Jehovah. In fact, nowhere in the New Testament do we find a teaching which insists that Christians use the name 'Jehovah'.

Finally, what effect did the beliefs of Charles Russell have upon his life? Several things we know for sure. It did not prevent the failure of his marriage to Maria Ackley. They went their separate ways in 1897. It did not prevent his falling into serious theological error. Among many of his errors, he believed Jesus returned secretly 1874, in spite of the clear teaching of Scripture that he will return powerfully and visibly (1Thess. 4:16-17).

His beliefs not prevent him from becoming a false prophet. He prophesied the end of the world in 1914. When that prediction failed, he settled on the following year, 1915. That also failed.

His beliefs did not prevent him from lying. In 1912, Russell sued a Baptist minister, the Rev. J. J. Ross who claimed in a pamphlet that Russell was a self-appointed pastor with no ministerial credentials. In the trial where Russell aimed to prove his credentials, Staunton, the Attorney, asked Russell, "Do you know the Greek alphabet?" Russell answered, "Oh yes." However, when presented with letters of the Greek alphabet, he could not correctly identify them. Staunton pressed him with further questions and finally asked, "Are you familiar with the Greek language?" Russell answered, "No." Russell lost the case.

Finally, his beliefs did not prevent his untimely death. He died on 31 October 1916 while aboard a train in Pampa Texas at the relatively young age of sixty-four.

NB: Unless otherwise stated, **bold** within quotes has been added for emphasis.

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June 2018

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